

I thank the Speaker for the time, and we will always remember Shannon.

REVITALIZING OUR ECONOMY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Madam Speaker, the challenge for all America, not just the new administration and Congress, but our communities, our businesses, especially American families, is how to revitalize our economy. There is a great deal of contention occasionally here in Washington, D.C. about the best approach, but this problem takes on a new urgency as the experts now tell us that while the economy appears to be recovering, the jobs aren't. A jobless recovery, posing special problems for Americans from coast to coast.

But beyond the problems with the economy, there are serious issues dealing with the state of repair of America; our electrical grid is inadequate and unreliable, too many roads and bridges are in serious disrepair, and there are problems with inadequate or non-existent sewage collection and leaking water mains. And there is environmental damage in sites from coast to coast with Superfund, brownfields, even unexploded ordnance and military toxics on military defense locations.

The opportunity and the challenge is to combine the problems with the economy with what we need to do to rebuild and renew America. Luckily, this is a solution that is overwhelmingly supported by the vast majority of Americans—Republicans, Democrats, and Independents. This is a solution that in times past has been able to bring together people in Congress to deal with the revitalization of our infrastructure.

We have opportunities right now. There is pending a reauthorization of the Surface Transportation Act. If Congress acts, and the administration signs it, this could mean 6 million jobs revitalizing transportation from coast to coast, border to border.

I have legislation, House bill 3202, a water trust fund, that would enable communities to deal with serious problems like leaking water mains. We lose 6 billion gallons of water a day, enough to fill Olympic size swimming pools from here to Pittsburgh. Coincidentally this bill can help fix these problems while putting hundreds of thousands of more Americans to work dealing with those problems.

The administration has requested, and we have introduced, legislation to reintroduce the Superfund tax to deal with the problems of Superfunds again that are found in every State of the Union. Left unattended, the pollution actually gets worse and migrates, becoming more expensive to clean up over time. This is an opportunity to solve the environmental problem and return this land to productive use.

This is something that America supports. The time for the Obama adminis-

tration and this Congress to unite on a vision to rebuild and renew America is now, to enact it into law and provide appropriate funding. This action will pay dividends to Americans for decades to come, making our communities more livable and our families safer, healthier, and more economically secure.

AARP GETS FREE PASS IN HEALTH CARE DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Ms. FOXX) for 5 minutes.

Ms. FOXX. Madam Speaker, does America's biggest senior citizens organization, AARP, get a free pass in the ongoing health care reform debate?

Speaker PELOSI recently called insurance companies "immoral villains," and Senator JAY ROCKEFELLER derided their tactics as "rapacious," yet the majority has simultaneously relied on an organization that has received billions of dollars in windfall profits from those same insurers as an "independent" source to support their government takeover of health care—AARP.

The Democrat majority has even relied on AARP's support for legislation, S. 1776, that would increase the Federal debt by nearly \$250 billion to fund physician reimbursements, even though the bill would raise seniors' Medicare premiums by over \$60 billion. AARP opposed unpaid-for legislation as recently as December for the very same reason.

An analysis of Democrats' rhetoric and actions provides evidence why AARP may have changed its position. In exchange for its support of a government takeover of health care, AARP has received special considerations regarding several provisions in health reform legislation that could benefit the organization quite handsomely.

While the AARP Web site claims that the organization supports "guaranteeing that all individuals and groups wishing to purchase or renew coverage can do so regardless of age or pre-existing conditions," a review of the New York State Insurance Commissioner's Web site finds that AARP-branded Medigap coverage imposes a 6-month waiting period for individuals with preexisting conditions. Yet section 111 of H.R. 3200 would exempt Medigap policies from new limits on preexisting condition restrictions, thus allowing AARP to continue to deny Medigap individuals with serious health conditions.

The health reform bill approved by the Senate Finance Committee would eliminate the tax deductibility for all insurance company executive salaries over \$500,000. However, as drafted by the committee, the legislation would exempt AARP from this requirement, even though fully 38 percent of its \$1.1 billion in 2008 revenue came directly from royalty fees paid by United

Health Care—more than AARP received in membership dues, grant revenue, and private contributions combined.

But for Chairman BAUCUS' exemption, AARP salaries would in fact be subject to the penalties in the Finance bill. In 2008, then CEO William Novelli received total compensation of \$1,005,830, more than 78 times the average annual Social Security benefit of \$12,738.

According to a story published today in the Washington Post, AARP collected \$650 million in royalties and other fees last year from the sale of insurance policies, credit cards, and other products that carry the AARP name. One of the main products that AARP pushes are so-called Medigap insurance policies for senior citizens. These policies supplement existing Medicare policies that seniors already have.

So what's the big deal? Well, in case you missed it, AARP is helping push the Democrats' big government version of health care reform. They've been a vocal proponent of the government-run health care proposal before Congress. Interestingly, the proposal before Congress slashed funding for a Medicare program called Medicare Advantage. This program is especially popular with seniors in my district. About 40,000 seniors in my district enjoy the benefits of a Medicare Advantage plan, but these plans will be killed off under the Democrats' government takeover of health care, and AARP has been pushing this brand of health care reform.

AARP has the right to offer services to its members, but pushing for a version of health care reform that will hurt millions of seniors who have Medicare Advantage plans and that will almost certainly increase shares of AARP's Medigap policies is a very dangerous conflict of interest.

AARP has hundreds of millions of dollars in insurance revenue on the line in today's health care debate. I think America's seniors deserve to know the facts about how health care reform will affect them, and it appears that AARP may have a few too many dogs in this race to be an impartial source of information.

□ 1045

CHOOSING HEALTH CARE REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. CONNOLLY) for 5 minutes.

Mr. CONNOLLY of Virginia. I thank the Speaker.

I rise today to support the economic engine of America—our small businesses. Small businesses represent more than 99 percent of all businesses in this country and employ more than 50 percent of the private sector, non-farm workforce. In fact, 25 percent of the total job growth from 1992 to 2005 came from those small businesses with